



GARY R. HERBERT
Governor

GREG BELL
Lieutenant Governor

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

PALMER DePAULIS
Executive Director

Division of Child and Family Services

BRENT PLATT
Director

September 16, 2010

Dear Rick:

Thank you for your letter from the State Quality Improvement Committee dated May 21, 2010. I realize I have probably worn out your patience in waiting for my reply, but please know that while I'm tardy in responding in writing, I have spent quite a bit of time thinking about your concerns and, in working with Ken Stettler from the Office of Licensing (OL). We are actually working to improve how OL and DCFS collaborate as we work to support foster parents (and potential foster parents).

In your letter, you outline the following concerns:

1. Statistical data regarding stability and permanency for older children in foster care.
2. There appears to be "a general disconnect between the process of licensing foster parents, and the needs, aims, and perceptions of the programs and personnel of both DCFS and the Foster Care Foundation."
3. A disconnect between "the licensing process and foster parents themselves".
4. The concern "that the bureaucratic process of licensing simply does not mesh with the less black-and-white needs and expectations of DCFS."
5. A concern that DCFS does not "feel an investment in its foster families."
6. Concerns among staff that the Office of Licensing and DCFS have different standards for which homes would qualify for licensing as foster homes.
7. Utah is the only state in the United States that has another agency approve and license foster parents.

I would like to address each of these concerns individually.

Regarding concern #1 about stability and permanency, you are correct that we need to improve in both of these areas. You're not the only one to notice this weakness in our system. The most recent Federal Child and Family Service Review conducted in Utah found the same concerns. (I've attached 4 charts to show how we're doing compared to the National Standard). Because of this, DCFS is preparing a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to the Feds, which will be completed in the next few months, and part of our plan will be to address these issues, with the expectation that we'll improve over the course of a year.

Regarding concerns #2 & #3, I think we all agree that everyone involved cares about children. Sometimes, however, there would appear to be a disconnect between the various agencies and groups. In order to address this issue, however, we need to make extra efforts not only to coordinate between the Foundation, OL, and DCFS, but to also work closely with Foster Parents, who really do have a very "up close" view on how the agencies are working together. Our agency has been working closely with representatives from the Utah Foster Adoptive Families Association (UFAFA), and we need to expand this relationship to both OL and the Foundation.

Regarding concern #4, as a result of your letter to DCFS and OL, and in an effort to improve/refine our support to the Licensing process, Ken Stettler and I are starting to meet at least monthly (along with state office staff), specifically to address issues and concerns that are brought to our attention. The goal of this monthly meeting is to not only discuss issues and concerns brought by OL and DCFS staff, but to respond to and correct the concerns. My plan is to include Representatives from the Foundation and UFAPA in this process as well. While they may not be able to attend in person, their input and ideas will be requested by DCFS before the monthly meetings.

Regarding concern #5, that DCFS caseworkers often don't feel an investment in foster families, while this may be partially true, each region does have a mechanism in place to get to know new foster parents. The issue is a little more complicated than our staff not feeling an investment in some families. Some other factors playing into this issue are:

--Some foster families are very selective about which children they are willing to foster (i.e., some only want to take children who are very young.)

--It's a fact that caseworkers do develop relationships with certain foster parents, and prefer to use these families whenever possible. While this may not seem fair to others, it needs to be realized that caseworkers have a very difficult job, and they need some latitude in this regard.

I will have a discussion with our Region Directors to discuss this concern and develop a way to improve, and I'll report back to your Committee on our progress.

Concern # 6 is an issue that is not new to either OL or DCFS. Currently, whenever I hear of a conflict between DCFS and OL regarding kinship licenses, I discuss the issue with Ken, who then follows up with his office. In addition, Ken sometimes hears of concerns from his Office regarding DCFS, and the demands we place on OL that are sometimes not realistic. When he shares these concerns with me, I address them immediately with the folks at DCFS. These issues are also going to be discussed at our monthly meetings I mentioned that I mentioned above. The goal will be to resolve them as quickly as possible and to the satisfaction of both agencies whenever possible.

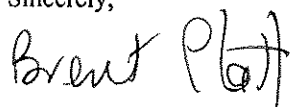
Regarding concern #7, you're right. Utah is the only State that has an outside agency that licenses and completes home studies for foster families. As a result of your letter, Palmer DePaulis, the new DHS Director, has agreed to discuss the matter with both DCFS and OL. Please know that I don't anticipate huge changes within our two agencies, but I do anticipate improved working relationships between OL and DCFS. Palmer is invested in helping to improve services within the Department, and Ken and I are committed to working more closely with each other, because we both want to do what's best for our families, children in state's custody, and our foster families.

Rick, I realize my letter is very long, but these issues are important and pressing. Kent Stettler and I would like to meet with you to further discuss the issues and share the progress being made. I would also be happy to report back to your committee.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to give Ken or me a call.

Thanks Rick, and thanks to the State QIC, for bringing these concerns to our attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brent Platt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brent Platt